

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 EB-07 TRSE-00 OMB-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 CU-02
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R 021530Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9188
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DUBLIN 1243

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT EI
SUBJ: THE IRISH ELECTION: MECHANICS AND ISSUES

REF: DUBLIN 1189

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE OUTCOME OF THIS THUS FAR RATHER ROUTINE IRISH ELECTION WILL DEPEND MUCH ON MECHANICS. LOCAL GOVERN-MINISTER JIM TULLY'S GERRYMANDER HAS GIVEN AN ADVANTAGE TO FINE GAEIL, BUT THE DISGRUNTLED LABOR VOTERS COULD USE THE COMPLICATED "TRANSFER" VOTING SYSTEM TO FRUSTRATE THE RULING COALITION'S HOPES. THE ISSUES ARE PREDICTABLY ECONOMIC, WITH FIANNA FAIL OFFERING A BOLD PROGRAM OF TAX CUTS AND PUMP-PRIMING FINANCED BY BORROWING. THE RULING FINE GAEIL LABORPARTY COALITIONCOMPLACENTLY POINTS TO ITS RECORD AND ATTEMPTS TO SHOW THAT THE ECONOMY IS IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE AND UNEMPLOYMENT IS STARTING TO DROP. FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN IRELAND ARE NOT BEING TALKED ABOUT, AT LEAST AT THIS EARLY STAGE. THE OUTCOME IS TOO CLOSE TO CALL, BUT A RECENT POLL GIVES FIANNA FAIL THE EDGE. END SUMMARY

2. THERE IS A CERTAIN RATHER ROUTINE DEJA VU ASPECT ABOUT
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THIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN IRELAND. THE SAME INDIVIDUALS ARE TALKING ABOUT THE SAME THINGS THEY TALKED ABOUT IN 1973. THE SAME OLD FACES APPEAR: SMOOTH AND REASONABLE JACK LYNCH VERSUS CRAGGY AND TACITURN LIAM COSGRAVE. THE CAMPAIGN WAS OPENED WITH A DEBATE BETWEEN THE BRILLIANT FACT MASTER GARRET FITZ-GERALD AND THE EARNEST BUT STUMBLING GEORGE COLLEY, ON PRIME-TIME IRISH TELEVISION, JUST AS IT WAS OPENED IN 1973. AGAIN

FITZGERALD WIPED OUT COLLEY. THE ISSUE, AND APPARENTLY THE ONLY ISSUE OF SUBSTANCE, IS THE POCKETBOOK.

3. MECHANICS ARE IMPORTANT IN THIS ELECTION; 2,118,600 ELIGIBLE VOTERS, INCLUDING 440,000 FIRST-TIME VOTERS, WILL ELECT 148 MEMBERS OF THE DAIL (LOWER HOUSE OF THE IRISH PARLIAMENT). THE SENATE (UPPER HOUSE) WILL CONDUCT ITS COMPLICATED ELECTION IN AUGUST. THE CONSTITUTION VIRTUALLY GUARANTEES A GOVERNMENT MAJORITY IN THE SENATE. THE CLASSIC IRISH POLITICIAN, MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT JIMMY TULLY (LABOR), HAS ACCOMPLISHED A CLASSIC GERRYMANDER OF ELECTORAL CONSTITUENCIES WHICH GIVES THE GOVERNMENT A BIG LEG UP IN MECHANICS. THE KEY TO THE GERRYMANDER IS THE REDISTRICTING OF THE DUBLIN CONSTITUENCIES (APPROX ONE-THIRD OF THE COUNTRY TOTAL) INTO SMALL THREE-SEAT UNITS, WHICH THEORETICALLY SHOULD PRODUCE ONE SEAT FOR EACH PARTY IN EACH CONSTITUENCY, GIVING THE FINE GAEL-LABOR COALITION ABOUT SEVEN MORE SEATS IN DUBLIN THAN THEY ACCOMPLISHED IN 1973. BUT ANOTHER ASPECT OF MECHANICS OPERATES FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY: I.E. THE SUPERIOR LOCAL WARD ORGANIZATION OF FIANNA FAIL. IN STRICT ORGANIZATIONAL TERMS FIANNA FAIL HAS A STRONG EDGE -- IT HAS PATTERNED ITSELF ON TAMMANY-STYLE ORGANIZATION, AND THE EFFICIENCY APPEARS TO HAVE INCREASED IN FOUR LEAN YEARS OF OPPOSITION. JACK LYNCH'S TRIO OF YOUNG TECHNOCRATS, SEAMUS BRENNAN, FRANK DUNLOP, AND ESMOND SMYTH, HAVE DONE A SUPERB JOB OF GETTING THE PARTY READY FOR THIS ELECTION, AND THEIR PARTICULAR HARD WORK IN BUILDING AN IMPRESSIVE PARTY YOUTH ORGANIZATION (FIRST AND ONLY ONE IN IRELAND) COULD BE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR. THE 18-25-YEAR-OLD FIRST-TIME VOTERS

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CONSTITUTE TWENTY PERCENT OF THE VOTE.

4. THE ELECTORATE IN IRELAND IS STABLE AND CONSERVATIVE, AND A SWING OF TWO OR THREE PERCENT IN "FIRST PREFERENCE" VOTES WOULD BE A LANDSLIDE HERE. ALSO, ACCORDING TO THE PROFESSIONALS, THE YOUTH ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO VOTE AS THEIR PARENTS DO. THIS REMAINS TO BE TESTED WITH SUCH A LARGE GROUP OF FIRST-TIME VOTERS. HOWEVER, MECHANICS COME IN AGAIN ON VOTING BECAUSE OF THE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM USED HERE, REQUIRING THE VOTER TO LIST HIS FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, ETC., CHOICES. PREFERENCE VOTES ARE CRUCIAL IN DECIDING THE ELECTION, AND IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN DISCIPLINE. FOR EXAMPLE, MANY LABOR-ORIENTED VOTERS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE POSITION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT, BUT BLAME THIS ON THE FINE GAEL SIDE. THUS FOR FIRST PREFERENCE THEY WOULD VOTE FOR THEIR LABOR PARTY MAN, AND ALSO PROBABLY LABOR SECOND (IF TWO LABOR PARTY CANDIDATES ARE UP), BUT THEN AT THE CRUCIAL POINT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DUBLIN 1243

A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER MIGHT DECIDE TO "TRANSFER" THEIR THIRD PREFERENCE TO A FIANNA FAIL CANDIDATE INSTEAD OF FINE GAEIL (AS THEY HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED), THUS PERHAPS GIVING FIANNA FAIL AN EXTRA SEAT OR TWO. THIS "TRANSFER" PROBLEM IS THE MAIN REASON WHY MOST PROFESSIONALS ARE WARILY HEDGING THEIR BETS ON THE ELECTION OUTCOME. WITH THIS COMPLICATED SYSTEM, ONE CAN APPRECIATE THAT THE POLLS' ACCURACY BEGINS TO SLIP BADLY WHEN QUESTIONING VOTERS ON SECOND, THIRD, OR EVEN FOURTH CHOICES.

5. ISSUES: BOTH PARTIES HAVE NOW PUBLISHED LENGTHY ELECTION MANIFESTOS. THE LAST SHORT PARAGRAPH IN FIANNA FAIL'S PAPER MENTIONS "EUROPE AND THE WORLD," BUT MOSTLY IN THE CONTEXT OF GETTING HIGHER LEVELS OF EC REGIONAL FUNDS FOR THE DEPRESSED WEST OF IRELAND. THE COALITION PAPER FAILS TO MENTION FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT ALL, BUT DOES HAVE A FINAL SHORT PARAGRAPH ON NORTHERN IRELAND (NOT MENTIONED BY FIANNA FAIL). WHILE CALLING FOR A POWER-SHARING GOVERNMENT IN THE NORTH, THE COALITION REITERATES THAT IT ACCEPTS THE "FACT OF THE EXISTENCE OF NORTHERN IRELAND UNTIL AND UNLESS A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND FREELY ACCEPT A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH
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THE REPUBLIC". NOTHING NEW HERE. IN GENERAL, FIANNA FAIL IS STAKING ITS CAMPAIGN ON A RATHER POSITIVE AND BOLD "PROGRAM" TO ATTACK BOTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION, WHILE OFFERING SOME TAX RELIEF. CURIOUSLY, THE GOVERNMENT, AT LEAST IN THE FIRST DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN, SEEMS TO BE BASING ITS CAMPAIGN MOSTLY ON ATTACKING THE FIANNA FAIL PROGRAM, A CURIOUS REVERSAL OF THE USUAL OUT/IN POSITIONS. THERE IS ALSO THE BEGINNINGS OF A PERSONALITY CAMPAIGN, CRITICIZING FAMILIAR OLD FIANNA FAIL CANDIDATES FOR THEIR FAILURES WHEN THEY WERE LAST IN POWER.

6. THE FIRST REACTION OF ONE ECONOMIST TO THE FIANNA FAIL PROGRAM WAS: "NEVER HAS SO MUCH BEEN GIVEN TO SO MANY BY SO FEW." IT IS TRUE THERE ARE SOME JUICY GIVEAWAYS: ABOLISHMENT OF "RATES" (A TYPE OF PROPERTY TAX); ABOLITION OF MOTOR TAX ON SMALL CARS (WELL AIMED AT THE YOUNG VOTER); AT TOTAL OF 160 MILLION POUNDS IN TAX CUTS. HOWEVER, UPON CLOSE EXAMINATION THE FIANNA FAIL APPROACH APPEARS TO BE A LOGICAL AND WELL-WORKED-OUT PROGRAM, THOUGH CHANCY. IT ASSUMES A SLOW EUROPEAN RECOVERY OVER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD AND PROVIDES FOR FAIRLY MASSIVE PUMP-PRIMING HERE TO ATTACK THE MAJOR PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT. THE PROGRAM COULD BE FUNDED BY EXTERNAL BORROWING WHICH WOULD RISE TO ABOUT 15 PERCENT OF GNP PER YEAR.

7. THE COALITION PROGRAM IS MUCH MORE CAUTIOUS, AND HAS A LOT OF VERBIAGE DEFENDING ITS RECORD OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS. IT POINTS TO THE NICE RISE IN INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT (11 PERCENT) IN 1976 AND CLAIMS THAT UNEMPLOYMENT IS FALLING. THE MESSAGE IS: WE GOT YOU THROUGH THE HARD TIMES, CAUSED BY EXTERNAL FACTORS, AND NOW WE HAVE TURNED THE ECONOMY AROUND. DONT DO AWAY WITH GOOD MANAGEMENT. ALSO, THE COALITION CAUTIOUSLY PROMISES SUCH THINGS AS INCREASED HOUSING STARTS, AND TO LABOR IT GIVES A VAGUELY DESCRIBED PROMISE TO ESTABLISH A "NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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CORPORATION." HOWEVER, SO FAR, THE COALITION CAMPAIGNERS ARE MOSTLY ATTACKING THE FIANNA FAIL PLAN RATHER THAN TALKING OF THEIR OWN PROGRAM.

8. A FOOTNOTE TO THIS CAMPAIGN: WOMEN'S LIBBERS ARE DIS-APPOINTED THAT TWO TALENTED WOMEN WHO WERE EXPECTED TO BE ELECTED APPEAR TO BE OUT. DUBLINER CARMENCITA HEDERMAN HAS WITHDRAWN FOR HEALTH REASONS AND SENATOR MARY ROBINSON WAS NOT NOMINATED BY HER LOCAL PARTY ORGANIZATION (SHE IS A FIERY RADICAL BY IRISH STANDARDS). HOWEVER, THE LABOR PARTY RULING BODY HAS USED ITS OPTION OF OVERRIDE AND

IS PUTTING HER IN AS A CANDIDATE ANYWAY. SHE HAS AN
OUTSIDE CHANCE OF GETTING ELECTED,THOUGH THE LABOR
VOTE IS BADLY SPLIT IN HER CONSTITUENCY. IT APPEARS
LIKELY THAT ONLY FOUR OR FIVE WOMEN WILL BE IN THE NEXT
DAIL, MOSTLY WIDOWS OR DAUGHTERS OF FORMER MEMBERS. RENDAHL

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